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## FRITHIOF PÅ SIN FADERS HÖG

In this canto (*Frithiof på sin faders hög*) Tegnér prepares his hero for a conversion to the new doctrine of Christianity which the priest of Balder expounds in the final canto, *Försoningen*. This preparation consists in the purifying process of prayer and a devotional communion with self and with nature. Not until Frithiof has completely and fully realized his guilt is he ready to receive the final act of atonement. The canto *Frithiof på sin faders hög* is essentially a soliloquy on the subject of sin and atonement, and as such it merits special consideration in the analysis of the poem. There is much here which is characteristic of Tegnér and it is with a view towards clarifying these elements that the following article has been written.

First of all, it is highly significant that Frithiof here enters into this state of spiritual communion. Such an inward contemplation in the quiet retreat of *Baldershage*, where all nature surrounds him with its benign influence, is true communion with God and therefore religion in its highest sense. Tegnér here reveals a cardinal doctrine of the Romanticists, viz., that inspiration comes to all lofty souls who are in tune with the Infinite.<sup>1</sup>

Romantic traits are also clearly marked in the symbolic interpretation of natural phenomena; such as the setting sun, the symbol of purity, with its red glow upon the mountain-tops, symbolizing the blood upon Balder's sacrificial altar, i.e., Frithiof's guilt. The vision of Balder's Temple itself is but the symbolic idealization of atonement.

Frithiof's sense of guilt is quickened by the contemplation of the scenes of his childhood which surround him. The Romantic poet thus enhances an emotion which is to culminate in a drastic accusation of self. The melancholy, introspective Frithiof betrays those peculiarities which Tegnér himself possessed in a

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my article "Romantic Elements in Tegnér's Religious Philosophy," *Scan. Studies and Notes*, V, 7, 1919, pp. 217 ff.

superlative degree and which mark his hero as the individual expression of the national character.<sup>2</sup> But such an expression is greatly enhanced by the poet's method of contrast, which brings Frithiof face to face with himself, as he once was in the innocence of his childhood days and as he now is, exiled and disgraced.

Frithiof's sense of guilt, while having its inception in a single act, is, nevertheless, based upon the conviction that the crime he has committed is due to certain qualities of his own character (i.e., his lack of self-control, his sense of individual liberty and his wilfulness). These qualities were to a large degree characteristic of Tegnér himself and in Frithiof's communion with self we see reflected a personal confession on the part of the poet,<sup>3</sup> as well as a delineation of certain dominant phases of Scandinavian character.<sup>4</sup>

Frithiof's reckoning with himself, while assuming both an individual and a national significance, may also be viewed as a question of universal import to humanity. In the last analysis we have to do here with the great question of sin and atonement. The solution which Tegnér seeks for this question is based upon a fundamentally Christian ideal, for Frithiof must first accomplish an inward purification<sup>5</sup> before the outward act has any real religious significance. Therefore, Frithiof must first pass thru the ordeal of judgment before the tribunal of his Norns (who have determined his character and his fate) before he can

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Tegnér's own *Anmärkingar såsom inledning till Frithiofs Saga* (1839).

<sup>3</sup> Cf., e.g., his letter to *G. F. Åkerhjelm*, Jan. 22, 1826: "Täta anfall af hypokondri och leda vid hela det menskliga lifvet, i synnerhet med mig sjelf, omvexla som oftast med transitorisk, öfvermodig och utsväfvande glädje. Mitt sinne är okristligt, ty det har ingen *sabbat*."

<sup>4</sup> Cf., e.g., *Gerda*:

Än i dag hvar Nordens son  
kommer ej så lätt ifrån  
jätten i sitt bröst, som pockar  
jämt på sjelfbestånd och lockar  
jämt till uppror eller knot  
alla himlens makter mot.

<sup>5</sup> Here Tegnér follows out his own ideal that religion is a development from within and that its outward expression or ritual is but the symbolical interpretation of the thing in itself: "teknet är ej saken."

be shrived by the priest of Balder, the exponent of Christian atonement. Conscious of this fact, Frithiof voluntarily prepares himself to face his judges; so he says in *Konungavalet*:

Till Balders hage vill jag gå,  
har möte stämmt  
med mina normor der: de stå  
och vänta jämt.

It is with himself that he is struggling.

The question of Frithiof's individual crime is, however, only one phase of the larger question of sin as the expression of character. That Tegnér thus expanded the question of sin from an individual crime into the universal relation of sin to character (the source of all deeds good or bad) seems to me entirely in keeping with the poet's purpose in writing the canto *Försoningen*, which like *Fridsröster* (1808) and *Nattvardsbarnen* (1820), gave voice to the poet's religious ideals.

The question at stake is fundamentally not Frithiof's individual crime in burning Balder's Temple but the relation of that crime to Frithiof's character. Therefore, Tegnér lessened the moral import of this crime in proportion as he revealed Frithiof's attitude towards God (not the god Balder but the Christian God as revealed in the Christian character). We feel Frithiof less and less reprehensible in proportion as we appreciate the inner struggle against self which he fought and in which he finally triumphed. Thus we see blended the Greek ideal of Fate (which robbed man of his free will and thus rendered him irresponsible of guilt) and the Christian ideal which is based upon charity for inherent qualities of character. Not only in the treatment of Frithiof's guilt but in all questions of morality Tegnér was in his poetry far more natural and sympathetic than artificial and imitative. In according Frithiof charity Tegnér did not (as Ljunggren<sup>6</sup> maintains) merely imitate the Ancient

<sup>6</sup> Cf. G. Ljunggren, "Tegnér's Frithiofs Saga," *Smärre Skrifter*, Lund, 1872, p. 43 f.: "Men här röjer sig sannolikt ett inflytande från den af skalden högt ställda Grekiska tragedien. Karakteriskt för den tragiska skulden efter antik uppfattning är, som bekant, att den framställes såsom ett verk på samma gång af den handlande hjetlen och af en utom honom stående magt, såsom på en

Hellenic ideal of Tragic Guilt (which at the same time is not guilt), but also sought to give voice to his own religious ideal that "the symbol is not the thing" (*tecknet är ej saken*). The thing in itself is Frithiof's *character*, one expression of which resulted in an act for which he must atone. But atonement for this single act necessitates a re-birth of the spirit, which will remove the cause of sin. Tegnér here speaks in terms of universal import to humanity and consequently Frithiof's individual crime assumes a character of far less seriousness than that which the objective view pertaining to Balder and the infringement upon the god's sanctity involve. In other words, the individual element is here fused into the universal, wherein the question of guilt and atonement is solved in terms of spiritual character. Sin exists in proportion to our moral sense and is not measured by any one outward act; a conventional sin is not synonymous with a sinful spirit. As to either the Old Norse or the Hellenic ideal of Fate, Tegnér utilized these only in so far as Frithiof (i.e., humanity) is not responsible for certain inborn characteristics (cf. *Försoningen*).

The first step towards atonement is remorse and the canto *Frithiof på sin faders hög* reveals Frithiof as overcome with a sense of guilt and self-accusation. His only fear is the fear of the god Balder, which is a 'Gothic' interpretation of the Christian fear of God. Frithiof's fear of God is a proof of his humility and a sign that he is now prepared to perform the outward act of atonement. The fact that he appeals to Balder's magnanimity to forgive him for a single wrong act committed in a moment of weakness:

försmå ej ångern, låt en lefnads ära  
försona dig för *ogonblickets fell*

is only the expression of Tegnér's humanitarian ideals which were fundamental to his religion, and has nothing to do with the question of irresponsibility or of Fate. Frithiof's sense of help-

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gång skuld och oskuld. Frithiofs skuld är, liksom den antike heroens, en ofrivillig och dock en självvållad.

"Ditt tempels brand var icke Frithiofs tanka."  
säger han till den vredgade guden."

lessness and his feeling of dependence upon a higher power are a clear reflection of his Christian attitude towards the Deity:

Min skumma blick, min gissning blott du lede!<sup>7</sup>  
ett ädelt sinne tål ej Balders vrede.

Furthermore, Frithiof's prayer to his dead father in the burial mound, asking him to reveal the secret of atonement, is a typical feature of Romantic poetry. The dead were supposed to be in possession of the great secrets of the universe; a conception which Tegnér repeatedly utilizes in his elegies.<sup>8</sup>

But prayer is not answered by a direct word of mouth from the dead or from God. Prayer is an attitude of mind towards the Creator and is answered only thru a spiritual response which flows back from the infinite source of the spirit. Tho the grave is silent, Frithiof receives in answer to his prayer the spiritual vision of Balder's Temple. Thus, prayer reveals the law of spiritual communion with the Deity, which results in an inspiration comparable to the manifestations of the miraculous, a conception in full accord with Tegnér's interpretation of miracles and divine revelation.<sup>9</sup>

"O, jag förstår er, mör från tidens källa,  
Det var ditt tecken, hjeltefader god!"

<sup>7</sup> Cf. this sentiment with that expressed in Cardinal Newman's hymn "Lead, Kindly Light."

<sup>8</sup> Cf. especially *Till friherrinnan Martina von Schwerin (1839)*:

och gåtan, som vi fåfängt gisse här,  
det tros att ordet dertill finnes der.

Cf. my article "Tegnér's Poetic Treatment of Death," *Scan. Studies and Notes*, VI, 4, 1920, pp. 102 ff.

In this conception of Frithiof's attempt to communicate with the dead there is perhaps a reflection of Ossian's influence upon Tegnér, cf. Fredrik Böök, "Tegnér och Ossian," *Samlaren*, XXXVII, 1916, pp. 141, 153.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. my article "Romantic Elements in Tegner's Religious Philosophy," *Scan. Studies and Notes*, 1919, pp. 217 ff. When, for instance, in his sermon *Vid kyrkoinvigningar* i Gårdsby (1837) Tegnér says: "Men det största undret är dock inom er sjelfa, i en själ, som anar hans (Guds) väsende, i et hjerta, som känner hans kärlek, som hoppas på hans barmhertighet" he has given expression to the same principle as that which wrought for Frithiof the 'miraculous' vision of Balder's Temple.

It is further significant that Tegnér refers to this vision as a *tecken*<sup>10</sup> (i.e., 'symbol'); the thing in itself (i.e., in its transcendental significance) was Frithiof's spiritual inspiration which was to result in a restoration of his integrity of character and in his spiritual re-birth. He had received God's mercy by a humble attitude of devotion.

When Frithiof approaches his father's burial mound, he meditates upon the great question of death:

Här är min faders grafhög. *Sofver* hjelten?  
Ack! han red hån, der ingen kommer från.

It is possible that we here have a reminiscence from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (III, 1) where Hamlet in his famous soliloquy philosophizes on the subject of death:

to die,—to sleep:—

. . . . .  
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn  
No traveller returns.

This is all the more likely in that elsewhere in the *Frithiofssaga* there are undoubtedly traces of Shakespeare's influence. Shakespeare was the great poet of humanity and the ideal of the Romantic writers.

After Frithiof has sensed the real meaning of his vision, he sinks down in quiet rest upon his father's grave. He has thus attained to that peace of mind necessary for atonement, as the poet says in *Fridsröster*:

i din egen barm du flykte  
och slut frid med verlden der!<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In depicting the vision of Balder's Temple it seems to me quite possible that Tegnér was influenced by the Biblical conception of the New Jerusalem which came down out of Heaven, symbolizing the Church of Christ in all its consummate glory; cf. Gal. IV, 26, Heb. XII, 22 and Rev. III, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Cf., e.g., the scene between Frithiof and Ingeborg in *Frithiofs lycka* with *Romeo and Juliet* III, 5; and in *Frithiofs frestelse* Frithiof's temptation to murder the defenseless old King Ring as he slept under Frithiof's protection:

Niding, vill du mörda sömnen? vill du värnlös gubbe slå?

with the parallel situation in *Macbeth* II, 1:

*Macb.* Methought I heard a voice cry *Sleep no more!*  
*Macbeth does murder sleep*,—the innocent sleep.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Försoningen*:

försoning bor,  
här nere som der uppe, der friden bor.

The preparation for atonement is now complete, for Frithiof's soul is now at one with the divine law of love essential to atonement.

The canto *Frithiof på sin faders hög* thus serves as an introduction to *Försoningen* and like "skaldens löpning på sin harpa" strikes the key note which resounds in clearer tones when the final act of atonement takes place. The sermon by the priest of Balder can not be rightly interpreted without a clear understanding of Frithiof's attitude towards himself and his crime, as revealed in the preceding canto. One most important feature in the priest's doctrine of atonement is thus made clear, viz., that Frithiof's crime was not the result of Fate but the result of his own wilful and impious attitude towards God, the abuse of his divine inheritance (*gode gudars gåfva*). The conventional crime was not the real sin for which he must atone,

"Ditt tempels brand var icke Frithiofs tanka."

The real sin lay in his succumbing to the temptations of evil, those inborn weaknesses personified as the work of *Nidhögg*<sup>13</sup> (*Satan*). As Henrik Ibsen<sup>14</sup> reflected in the characters of Brand and Peer Gynt much that was characteristic of himself and the Norwegian people, so in the *Frithiofssaga* and especially in this canto (*Frithiof på sin faders hög*) Tegnér reveals in the character of Frithiof that which was at once personal and national. If Frithiof possessed those qualities which resulted in the collapse of Tegnér's own genius (viz., his morbid introspection, his lack of moral equipoise, his pessimistic attitude towards humanity and his selfish wilfulness) he was, nevertheless, like Tegnér himself, absolutely honest (*bottenärlig*), and it was this fundamental honesty and humility which made his redemption possible. Frithiof's soliloquy before the final atonement reveals this fact and proves the poet himself as true to his own thesis in life, "tecknet är ej saken." Tegnér never wished to be believed

<sup>13</sup> "Den grymme Nidhögg ifrån mörkrets värld" symbolizes in Frithiof's case the same evil power as Tegnér's own *svartalf* (in *Mjøltsjukan*).

<sup>14</sup> Cf., e.g., Ibsen's letter of Oct. 28, 1870: "Brand er mig selv i mine bedste øieblikke, ligeså visst som jeg ved selvanatomi har bragt for dagen mange træk både i Peer Gynt og i Stensgård."



better or greater than he really was. His modesty and humility were proverbial and these were the main features in Frithiof's character when he at last came to his better self. In this respect Frithiof is a reflection of Tegnér's own soul, not only at his best moments, as Ibsen says of himself with reference to Brand (cf. foot note 14), but as he naturally was at all times. It was these great qualities of the spirit, as well as his poetic genius, which made Tegnér one of the most beloved poets of the North. His emphasis upon the dignity of religion and of human conduct:

hvad sjelf du brutit gäldar ingen ann för dig,

was a courageous and noble act. But no one can atone for a wrong deed, until he has fully and completely recognized that act as wrong, and this is one of the hardest things for humanity to realize.<sup>15</sup>

In *Frithiof på sin faders hög* Tegnér reveals those secret thoughts with which all sinful humanity is afflicted. That Frithiof, unlike Peer Gynt, has kept alive *den himmelska lågan*<sup>16</sup> ('the heavenly flame') is only a proof of Tegnér's conviction as to the divinity of man and his essentially benign character. Tegnér's Frithiof thus becomes the poetic counterpart of the better man, whose honesty and contrite heart are no mean encomium upon the poet and upon the Swedish people.

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<sup>15</sup> It will be noted that Frithiof accuses Nidhög of his (Frithiof's) crime. But the priest of Balder makes it clear that Frithiof must hold himself responsible for his own reckless conduct:

Men kraft förutan fromhet tär ock bort sig sjelf,  
som svärdet tärs i högen: hon ar livvets rus,  
men glömskans häger sväfvar öfver hornets brädd,  
och när den druckne vaknar, blygs han för sitt dåd.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Fridsröster*:

Menska, någon himmelsk flamma  
lefter i dig, vårda den!

Frithiof keeps alive 'the heavenly flame' by responding to his better impulses.